

Site Clarifications at Panther Bluffs, on the Delaware and Hudson Railroad

By S. Robert Powell

At Panther Bluffs, at the north end of the switchback on the Honesdale Branch of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad, the rail line intersects Panther Creek as it descends the mountain in a series of no less than five waterfalls. This intersection is at the base of the first waterfalls down the mountain. At that site, the remains of a poured concrete structure, in the middle of which there is a large round hole, can be seen. Also, on this site can be seen significant wall/dam foundations. On first glance, it looks like there was a dam across the water course down the mountain at this location. But why? And what about that large round hole in the middle of the poured concrete structure?

What are we looking at? For no less than forty years, railroad historians and other visitors to this site have been at a loss to explain the purpose/function of this poured concrete structure with a large round hole in the middle, and the substantial wall/dam foundations at this site.



View, looking up the mountain, from the foot of the first waterfalls down the mountain.



This is a portion of the man-made structure at the base of the top falls on the mountain at Panther Bluffs.

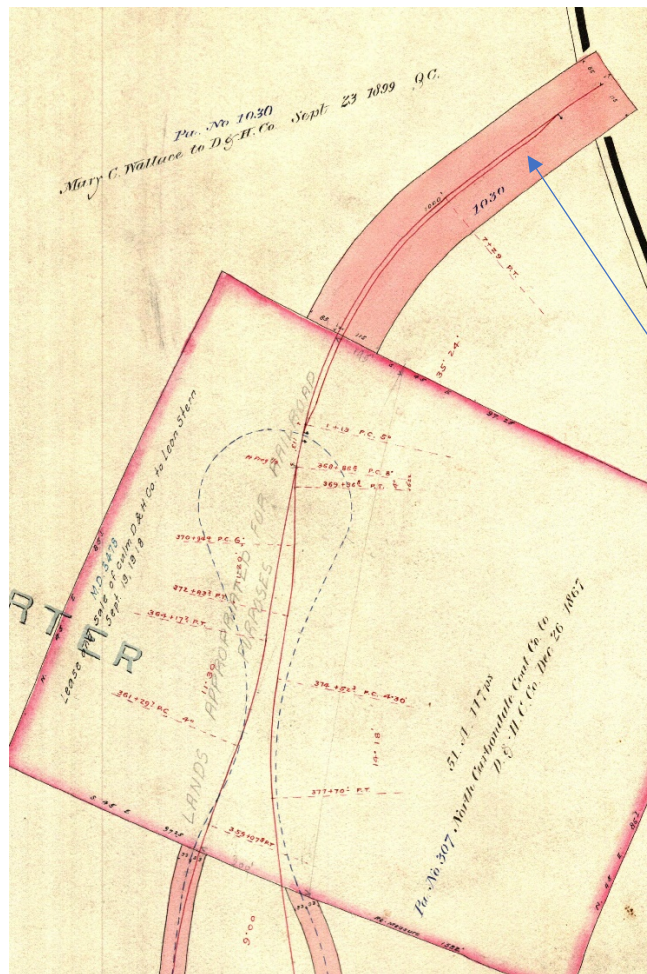
On May 20, 2022, while doing research on the Honesdale Branch of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad, I read, in my own Volume V (*Delaware and Hudson Canal Company Gravity Railroad 1899 Configuration*, pp. 132-133) a newspaper article titled “OPERATIONS ON THE NEW BRANCH. / Hustling the Work on All Sections—Line of the New Route Down the Mountain Side”. In the last several lines of that article, to my great surprise and immense pleasure, is the

answer to the questions posed at the head of this text about (1) the remains of a poured concrete structure at this site, in the middle of which there is a large round hole, and (2) the significant and substantial wall/dam foundation at this site. Here is that article:

“OPERATIONS ON THE NEW BRANCH. / Hustling the Work on All Sections—Line of the New Route Down the Mountain Side. / The new route from Farview to Waymart by rail that will take the place of the three inclined planes that are at present used to overcome the elevation there is one that has entailed much skillful engineering and as the work of following out the lines laid by the engineers progresses many difficulties that had to be overcome are more readily seen. The new track will join the old road bed about a quarter of a mile this side of Farview station running directly in the general trend of the old tracks for a short distance, then making a sweeping curve to the right. It continues in an almost straight line down the mountain side to the Swackhammer farm where it begins the curve that turns it in the direction of Waymart. / The scene all along this line is a busy one, and here are seen the most modern methods of railroad building. The appliances named in yesterday’s paper are all in active operation. Everything has the appearance of hustle and bustle, and it is no doubt the busiest scene that part of the country has ever seen. The whole is a series of cuts and embankments making the most of the work entailed, excavating. The irregularity of the land is illustrated by the fact that in one place an embankment is made perhaps, fifteen feet high, while near it will be a cut ten or twelve feet deep. Of course the earth taken from the cut is used to form part of the embankment. / The place where the new track will rejoin the old road has not yet been determined, the surveyors being still engaged in running lines in the vicinity of Waymart. / There are active road building operations nearer home, however than at Farview for near cold spring nearly two hundred men are engaged in changing the sharp curve at that place. The new line makes the track several rods longer at this point and throws it off the present road bed entirely. Here also temporary construction tracks have been laid, trestles have been built and dump cars and a steam shovel are in use. / At Shepherd’s crook the excavating and filling is about complete, the extension of the track for the switchback following the side hill in a curve instead of crossing the canyon. At the head of the canyon it crosses the place where the falls were, on an embankment the water passing through three immense iron pipes at the overflow of the small dam, which is used to supply Vandling breaker with water. Here, contrary to the general supposition, the grade is very slight, there being none to overcome except in ascending to the extension and from there to the grade of the old road bed about an eighth of a mile above the crook.”(*Carbondale Leader*, September 15, 1899, p. 2)

Answer: The poured concrete structure with a large round hole in it near the base of the first falls down the mountain at Panther Bluffs and the significant wall/dam foundations there were components of a water-supply system (dam and water pipes) for the Vandling coal breaker.

Contained in this same article from the *Carbondale Leader* about the construction of the Honesdale Branch of the D&H Railroad is the answer to another question that has been asked many times over the years--and never answered definitively--about the D&H rail line in the Panther Bluffs area (see detail given below from the D&H Honesdale Branch map volume).



The northern end of the switchback at Panther Bluffs. The heavy black line and the fine line next to it mark the edge of the map, and should not be seen as a cartographic representation of the Panther Creek as it descends the mountain.

The question: Did the northern end of the switchback cross the canyon / the path of the many falls on Panther Creek down the mountain? In that same issue of the *Carbondale Leader*, the answer to that question is given, as follows: “At Shepherd’s crook the excavating and filling is about complete, the extension of the track for the switchback following the side hill in a curve instead of crossing the can[y]on [emphasis added].”. **The answer:** The switchback did not cross the canyon.

Lesson Learned: It’s important to re-read, years later, everything that you read many years ago on a given topic. You never know what you’re going to discover on re-reading that you missed (or declared to be irrelevant) on your first reading of that material many years ago.

* * * * *

May 20, 2022